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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MANAGUA 000013

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/07

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: Lords of the Narco-Coast: Part II - Community Reaction  
Divided, FSLN Blames U.S. for Crisis

REF: A) 2009 MANAGUA 1149 (LORDS OF NARCO-COAST PART I)  
B) 2009 MANAGUA 1051 (PRIMER ON MISKITO INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT)  
C) 2009 MANAGUA 1047 (MISKITO INDEPENDENCE RALLY TURNS DEADLY)  
D) 2008 MANAGUA 1517 AND PREVIOUS (FRAUD IN RAAN ELECTIONS)  
E) 2008 MANAGUA 419 AND PREVIOUS (GON SUSPENDS RAAN MUNICIPAL  
ELECTIONS)

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert J. Callahan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(A), (B),  
(D)

#### SUMMARY

¶1. (C): On December 8, after a plane laden with cocaine and cash crash-landed in the remote, small village of Walpa Siksa in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), a deadly confrontation took place between Nicaraguan anti-drug units and drug smugglers allied with some number of local residents. This message is the second in a series that reports on the Walpa Siksa incident and its immediate aftermath, and explores what these events have revealed about the actual state of organized trafficking operations in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast.

¶2. (C) In the aftermath of the incident, public reactions have been divided. Some regional politicians and leaders of the indigenous Yatama political party have called the incident and subsequent government operations in the region a new "Red Christmas Massacre" - a reference to the Sandinistas' deadly attacks on indigenous Miskitos in the 1980s, assertions the military contests are false. Religious leaders have denounced these same political leaders for turning a blind eye to the increased drug activity. Former Vice President (and ex-Sandinista), Sergio Ramirez, has decried the presence of trafficking organizations as a national security threat, while a senior current FSLN official accused the United States, specifically the CIA, of "promoting" the drug trade to destabilize the country. Underneath all lies a subtext of the perennial rivalry and racial conflict between Nicaragua's Pacific (Hispanic) and Atlantic (Afro-Caribbean and Amerindian) cultures. Yet, also through the dissonance, the Walpa Siksa incident and its aftermath seem to indicate stronger linkages between drug smugglers and local communities in Nicaragua's Atlantic region than previously believed. END SUMMARY

REGIONAL POLITICIANS BLAME THE MILITARY - SEEK A NEW CRISIS

¶3. (C) The Walpa Siksa village, where the December 8 incident occurred, is in a region historically controlled by Yatama; the

regional, indigenous Miskito political party. Much of Yatama's leadership itself has been co-opted by the ruling Sandinista Party (REF D) over the last few years. Even so, regional politicians and several Yatama leaders have taken to the airwaves, primarily on their new Yatama radio station (reportedly funded by the government), to condemn the Nicaraguan military for its continuing operations in the vicinity of Walpa Siksa and Prinzapolka. These leaders, including Brooklyn Rivera, a Yatama National Assembly Deputy; Reynoldo Francis, Governor of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN); Roberto Wilson, the RAAN Vice Governor; and Elizabeth Enriquez Francis, former mayor of RAAN capital Bilwi (and ex-wife of Governor Francis), have used Miskito-language radio broadcasts from the new station to claim that the Nicaraguan anti-drug unit had violated human rights in pursuing its investigation and by detaining suspects from Walpa Siksa. These leaders vehemently denied that these coastal communities support, house and abet drug smugglers, as had been charged by some critics. Rivera told national media that "the soldiers are all from the Pacific coast. There has been racism, robberies and looting of indigenous people's homes." Other Miskito leaders claim that the soldiers have killed livestock and stolen food donated to the community by the World Food Program.

14. (C) Rivera, Francis, Wilson, and Enriquez have all called for and even led several protests against police and navy forces stationed in Bilwi, creating a new crisis in the region. They have denounced the "human rights violations" by the anti-drug unit against the "innocent" indigenous people and claim that the military "occupation" of Walpa Siksa is rife with abuses. This racially-charged agitation led some in the Miskito community to set up illegal road blocks at the town of Sinsin, preventing traffic on the only road between Bilwi and Managua. There were also attempts to take over the Bilwi International Airport and the capital's main wharf. These Yatama leaders and radicalized supporters have demanded that the Navy cease all operations on the Atlantic Coast, withdraw from the region, and immediately release the roughly two dozen suspects detained in Walpa Siksa and Prinzapolka. (see SEPTEL). Rivera also told reporters that the Walpa Siksa community elders had decided to abandon their community if the military did not depart or carried out its plan to establish a permanent presence in the area.

#### MORAVIAN CHURCH LEADER CONDEMNS GOVERNMENT COLLUSION

15. (U) The Moravian Church is the largest denomination on the Atlantic Coast and a large majority of indigenous Miskitos belong to it, making the church the moral authority in the region; even more so than the Catholic Church. On Friday, December 13, Moravian Church Superintendant Cora Antonio issued a grave statement against the local Walpa Siksa community leaders, police officials and military officials in the Atlantic, whom she claimed knew about the narco-trafficking base in Walpa Siksa, but took no action until the recent plane crash. Antonio, who will finish her two-year term in January 2010, complained that drug smugglers had established their networks unchallenged by the GON and exploited the extreme poverty on the Coast. She also claimed that elected officials, including Francis, Wilson, and Lidia Coleman, the mayor of nearby Prinzapolka, as well as police and military authorities, "knew from the beginning of the installation of this narco-traffickers' base, but never did anything about it." She also stated that in certain Caribbean communities the narco-traffickers exercised the highest authority, above that of the community judge, the village elders, even the pastor or "sindico," and that they frequently commanded the "last word" on community decisions. Antonio also said the Moravian Church had recently removed a reverend from the Walpa Siksa village out of fear that he would be physically attacked for preaching against drugs from the pulpit.

#### WIHTA TARA ALSO SAYS MILITARY SHOULD LEAVE

16. (U) Other non-FSLN-aligned indigenous leaders took aim at the President Ortega and at the military's recent actions. The Wihta Tara of the Miskito Nation, aka the Rev. Hector Williams, who denounced the Managua government and called for Miskito independence, told the media that Columbian drug traffickers had already left, so the military should leave as well. NOTE: The Wihta Tara (Miskito for "great judge"), was elected by the Council of Elders of the Miskito Nation and leads Miskito separatist

movement that mounted protests which were violently suppressed this past October (REF E) END NOTE. Williams stated that "the army is after the money that they think is hidden in the community." Building on the racial inequality theme, another separatist leader, Steady Alvarado, publicly questioned why the military felt it could take actions in the indigenous communities that it would never attempt on the Pacific Coast. The Miskito Council of Elders itself issued a statement on December 12 blaming President Ortega directly for the "tortures, persecutions and death of our community members in Walpa Siksa." It also accused Ortega of being "incapable of neutralizing" drug trafficking activity on the Atlantic Coast, and for again "bearing a grudge" against the Coastal peoples, "like he did during the Navidad Roja (Red Christmas Massacre)." NOTE: The Red Christmas Massacre occurred in 1981, when Sandinista military operations in the Atlantic Coast killed dozens and forcibly relocated hundreds of Miskitos thought to be collaborating with the Contras. END NOTE.

ARMY CHIEF DENIES RIGHTS VIOLATIONS - YIELD "NOT ONE INCH TO NARCOS"

17. (U) General Omar Halleslevens, Commander of the Nicaraguan military, told reporters that the Army would not leave Walpa Siksa, nor would it stop searching neighboring communities for drug traffickers. He insisted that the Army would remain and would take appropriate measures to protect the area from again becoming a haven for drug trafficking. Halleslevens denied accusations that the military had violated human rights, saying "our line has been from the very beginning to respect life, human rights, private property and the law ... as we are completing our duty to support the police in applying the law." He further declared that the military would "not give a rock, nor even an inch of the national territory, to narco-traffickers" and called on government institutions and the population to support law enforcement in its fight. NOTE: Thus far, Post has no/no credible evidence of human rights violations by law enforcement related to this operation. We continue to monitor the situation closely and will report relevant developments if they occur. END NOTE.

FORMER FSLN VICE PRESIDENT CONDEMNS NARCOS, BLAMES GOVERNMENT

18. (U) Adding to the chorus of concern about the absentee national government was author and former Nicaraguan/FSLN vice president, Sergio Ramirez, who said in an op-ed that the strong narco-traffickers presence on the Caribbean Coast threatened Nicaragua's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He believed that the "narco-traffickers will promote the separation of the Caribbean Coast (REF E) and already have the social base to do it" because of the significant resources drug smugglers enjoy and the rampant political corruption in the region. Ramirez also said the confrontation between the anti-drug units and the Walpa Siksa community demonstrated that criminal organizations had achieved enormous influence on the Atlantic Coast while the "government does not do anything to stop the problem."

FSLN LEADER BLAMES THE U.S., CIA FOR THE CRISIS, MAY CANCEL ELECTIONS

19. (U) In contrast, during December 16 interviews, Steadman Fagoth, a Miskito indigenous leader, former Contra commander, and now ardent Ortega supporter, told FSLN-controlled media that United States had created the Walpa Siksa crisis. Fagoth, who is also president of the Government's Fishing Authority (INPESCA), spoke to Multinoticias Channel 4, owned and operated by the Ortega-Murillo family, and to "El 19," the official on-line newspaper of the Sandinista Government. He claimed that the United States, through the CIA, was trying to provoke an uprising in the Atlantic Coast against the government by supporting narco-criminals. He added that Alberto Luis Cano, the fugitive Colombian drug leader and passenger of the crashed drug airplane (see SEPTTEL-Part I) had been hired by the CIA to promote an uprising among the native population, by playing on the racial animosity between Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic populations. Perhaps Fagoth's most troubling comment was that because of the current unrest, the government might delay regional elections scheduled for March 2010.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) In the cacophony following the Walpa Siksa incident, statements of FSLN official Steadman Fagoth are perhaps the most politically ominous. Fagoth is a regular proxy for Ortega's Atlantic policy. His remarks frequently represent test balloons for how Ortega perceives the situation and how the President seeks to position himself against any fallout. Fagoth's anti-U.S. accusations are outrageous, but not unexpected -- that the United States and CIA employed a drug trafficker to create this crisis, destabilize the region and overthrow the government. He made similar accusations about the United States and CIA when the Wihta Tara announced the separatist movement several months ago. In 2008, the GON delayed RAAN municipal elections (REF E) on dubious grounds. Thus Fagoth's comment about delaying the March 2010 regional elections may indicate Ortega's true intent: freeze everyone in place.

¶11. (C) The Walpa Siksa incident and its aftermath aggravated underlying tensions and divisions that persist in the Atlantic, and may have exposed new evidence about the nature and extent of narco-trafficking activity. Serious concerns about threats to national security and sovereignty have been raised by critics of the government. Some community leaders, such as Moravian Superintendent Cora Antonio, have spoken out about what they see as rampant drug corruption and political collusion by RAAN political leaders. We find it odd that these same political leaders, such as Rivera, Francis, Wilson and Enriquez agitated against military counter-drug operations, and virtually denied the existence of any narco-trafficking activity. At a minimum, their efforts to fan latent racial resentments seem self-serving re-election efforts in the run-up to regional elections. For its part, the military denies any human rights abuses in this, its largest anti-drug land operation in the Caribbean in years. In a subsequent message we will provide more detail about the figures caught up in the Walpa Siksa incident and outline some of the networks and relationships that we believe traffickers may have been able to establish.

CALLAHAN